

IN THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently amended) Software for use on a client device that is configured for communications with a multiplicity of other client devices via a communications network, comprising:

a communications function that effects:

a send e-mail communication link between the client device and an e-mail service provider server system via the communications network whenever the user desires to send e-mail messages;

a receive e-mail communication link between the client device and the e-mail service provider system via the communications network whenever the user desires to check for received e-mail messages; and

an advertisement download communication link between the client device and an advertisement distribution server system via the communications network system, at selected advertisement download times;

an e-mail composition function for enabling a user of the client device to compose e-mail messages;

an e-mail send function that enables the user to send e-mail messages to other client devices via the send e-mail communication link;

an e-mail receive function that enables the user to receive e-mail messages from other client devices via the receive e-mail communication link; and

an advertisement download function that downloads advertisements from the advertisement distribution server system via the advertisement download communication link;

wherein the e-mail service provider server system and the advertisement distribution server system are separately controlled.

2-10. (Canceled)

11. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising:
an advertisement storage function for storing downloaded advertisements on a storage medium within the client device; and
an advertisement display function that displays one or more selected ones of the stored advertisements, while the user is composing and/or reading e-mail messages.

12. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 11, wherein the advertisement display function controls the display of the stored advertisements in accordance with ad display parameters prescribed by the advertisement distribution server system, which ad display parameters are unknown to the e-mail service provider.

13. (Currently amended) The software as set forth in Claim 12, further comprising a user activity monitor function that is activated when the software is operating in ~~the~~ a first operating mode, wherein the user activity monitor function generates user activity information that is used by the advertisement display function in controlling a duration for which advertisements are displayed.

14-45. (Canceled)

46. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising an advertisement storage function for storing downloaded advertisements on a persistent storage medium within the client device.

47. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 46, further comprising an advertisement display function for displaying the stored advertisements on the client device.

48. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 47, wherein the advertisements comprise advertisement files each of which includes an advertisement and a plurality of ad display parameters associated with that advertisement.

49. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 48, wherein the advertisement display function displays the stored advertisements according to the ad display parameters.

50. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 49, wherein the advertisement download function downloads separate portions of a single advertisement file over two or more advertisement download sessions.

51. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 50, wherein each advertisement includes an image.

52. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 51, wherein each image comprises a GIF image.

53-117. (Canceled)

118. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the software includes at least three operating modes, including:

a first operating mode in which the advertisement download function is activated;

a second operating mode in which the advertisement download function is not activated;

a third operating mode in which the advertisement download function is not activated;

wherein the software includes an enhanced set of e-mail features when operating in either the first or third operating mode, and includes a reduced set of e-mail features when operating in the second operating mode; and

wherein the software is free when operating in either the first or second operating mode, but must be paid for when operating in the third operating mode.

119-148. (Canceled)

149. (Currently amended) The software as set forth in Claim ~~135~~ 118, further comprising:
an advertisement download monitor function that is activated when the software is in the first operating mode, wherein the advertisement download monitor function determines whether or not an ad download failure condition has occurred, whereby the ad download failure condition occurs when the advertisement download function has not successfully downloaded advertisements over a prescribed time period;

an e-mail function monitor function that determines whether or not an e-mail function failure condition has occurred, whereby the e-mail failure condition occurs when the software has not successfully sent and/or received e-mail messages over the prescribed time period; and

an adware failure nag function that is activated when the software is in the first operating mode upon detection that an ad download failure condition has occurred and an e-mail function failure condition has not occurred, whereupon the adware failure nag function generates an adware nag failure display at prescribed ad failure nag intervals, wherein the adware nag failure display notifies the user that advertisements have not been successfully downloaded, and warns the user that the operating mode of the software will be switched from the first operating mode to the second operating mode if the ad download failure condition is not rectified.

150-153. (Canceled)

154. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 149, wherein the adware failure nag function includes a counter function that is incremented by one each day that advertisements are not successfully downloaded subsequent to initial detection of an ad download failure condition, and is decremented by one each time it is determined by the advertisement download monitor function that advertisements have been successfully downloaded for a prescribed period of time.

155. (Canceled)

156. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 154, wherein the counter function has two terminal conditions, including a first terminal condition which occurs when it is decremented to zero, in which case the adware failure nag function is de-activated, and a second terminal condition which occurs when it is incremented to a prescribed terminal count.

157. (Canceled)

158. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 156, wherein the prescribed terminal count corresponds to a prescribed maximum ad failure time period.

159. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 158, further comprising a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the second operating mode upon expiration of the prescribed maximum ad failure time period.

160. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 158, further comprising:

a deadbeat user alert function that generates a mode switch alert display upon expiration of the prescribed maximum ad failure time period, wherein the mode switch alert display notifies the user that the software is about to be switched from the first operating mode to the second operating mode, unless the user takes immediate corrective action to rectify the ad download failure condition; and

a mode switching function that switches the software from the first operating mode to the second operating mode if the user does not take immediate corrective action in response to the mode switch alert display.

161. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 118, further comprising:
an advertisement storage function for storing downloaded advertisements on a storage medium associated with the client device;
an advertisement display function that displays one or more selected ones of the stored advertisements ;
an obscured ad monitor function that determines whether an obscured ad condition has occurred, whereby the obscured ad condition occurs when an advertisement currently being displayed on a display screen associated with the client device is being obscured by one or more other items currently being displayed on the display screen; and
an obscured ad nag function that generates an obscured ad nag display in response to detection of the obscured ad condition, wherein the obscured ad nag display notifies the user of the obscured ad condition.

162. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 161, wherein the obscured ad nag display further notifies the user that the obscured nag display will be generated upon each future occurrence of an obscured ad condition.

163-169. (Canceled)

170. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising:
an advertisement storage function for storing downloaded advertisements on a storage medium associated with the client device; and
an advertisement display function that displays one or more selected ones of the stored advertisements.

171-293 (Canceled)

294. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 170, further comprising:

- a playlist request function that generates a playlist request that includes a current playlist(s) ID that identifies a current playlist(s);

- a playlist request transmit function that transmits the playlist request to at least one playlist server; and

- a playlist response handling function that receives and processes a playlist response generated by the at least one playlist server in response to the playlist request;

wherein the playlist response includes an at least one new playlist that includes a plurality of ad identifiers that identify corresponding advertisements, a plurality of addresses that identify the source of respective ones of the advertisements, and at least one new playlist ID that identifies the at least one new playlist.

295. (Canceled)

296. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the advertisement distribution system includes:

- at least one ad server, each of which stores at least one of a plurality of advertisements to be downloaded; and

- the at least one playlist server.

297-312. (Canceled)

313. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 294, wherein the playlist response handling function compares the ad identifiers in the at least one new playlist and ad identifiers in the current playlist(s), and generates a list of addresses that identify the sources of advertisements corresponding to the ad identifiers in the at least one new playlist that are not contained in the current playlist(s).

314. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 313, further comprising an ad fetch function that fetches the advertisements corresponding to the generated list of addresses from the sources corresponding to the generated list of addresses.

315. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 314, further comprising an ad fetch function that fetches the advertisements corresponding to the generated list of addresses from the sources corresponding to the generated list of addresses, over two or more advertisement download sessions.

316. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 315, wherein the selected advertisement download times span a plurality of online e-mail sessions during which the client device is online for the purpose of sending and/or receiving e-mail messages.

317. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 316, wherein the playlist request transmit function transmits the playlist request to the at least one playlist server at prescribed playlist check intervals.

318. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 317, wherein the playlist response further includes a client information portion that includes a playlist request interval data field that specifies the prescribed playlist check interval.

319. (Original) The software as set forth in Claim 318, wherein the prescribed playlist check intervals span a plurality of online e-mail sessions during which the client device is online for the purpose of sending and/or receiving e-mail messages.

320-420. (Canceled)